

would call the collective unconscious). Driving round Yosemite National Park in California, it might be tempting to fantasize that here at last is pristine landscape preserved as nature intended. But, Schama notes, the very flora and fauna of the park, with its giant sequoias, is the product of epochs of Native Indian husbandry, involving routine forest burning; and in any case our idea of Yosemite is of a landscape from which the white conservationist, tourist or backpacker has peremptorily excluded its former human denizens.

The face of nature everywhere bears the imprint of man, and nowhere more emblematically than at Mount Rushmore National Monument in South Dakota, with its gargantuan presidential visages carved into the very cliff. Meanwhile, be it in the form of zoos, greenhouses or urban parks, civilization incorporates the spirit of nature. This explains why Schama can feel less gloomy than those radical environmentalists who prophesy the wholesale and final ruin of our planet. For his historical message is that man and nature have been engaged in a perpetual exchange in which man's impact on the landscape creates and recreates environmental aesthetics that perennially assume new meanings and emotional investments. "It is in vain", writes Schama, approvingly citing Henry David Thoreau, "to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves".

Schama is a master storyteller, imaginative and immediate. He is also a master of history in a more academic sense, equally at home with the minutiae of mediaeval theology as when discussing a contemporary artist such as Anselm Kiefer. Not least, he interweaves his historical tapestry with autobiographical threads: the boy living along the River Thames just down from Tilbury, penning a schoolboy history of the Royal Navy; watching his father feasting on whitebait at the Savoy Hotel; and then eventually travelling to the Lithuanian forests to unearth those Jewish roots (implausible though it may sound, his mother's Orthodox forebears turn out to have been loggers).

Like a mature greenwood, Schama's work is dense and variegated; and as with all good fairy stories, the path through the forest is twisting, with impenetrable undergrowth and enticing glades and daring detours. Much is omitted — not least, it must unfortunately be said, the history of science and its impact on Western concepts of the environment. Reading *Landscape and Memory*, the happy wanderer may sometimes feel he cannot see the wood for the trees. But Schama might not be discomfited — he would be ready with a quip, quoting the art historian Aby Warburg: "God lies in the details". □

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Monstrous perceptions

Frank Gonzalez-Crussi

The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World.

By Robert Garland. Duckworth: 1995. Pp. 222. £35, \$39. Distributed in the US by Cornell University Press.

AT first blush, no human activity seems simpler than seeing. In fact, none is so complex or so precariously perched above the twin-sloped precipice of ambiguity and misperception. But when the object seen is the human body, the risks are multiplied. For a universal notion that we find irresistible is that the body has a representational function; that it is what it is, as



From *The Eye of the Beholder*

Bronzed beauty — phallic dwarf (early first century AD).

well as 'something else'. It incarnates an interiority, an occult reality, a significance or a 'soul' that projects itself on the visible surface, upon which it leaves, indefectibly, its mysterious mark or imprint. Thus the human body is a cipher, a hieroglyph that must be interpreted; and every age, every society, must provide its particular interpretation. Hence the uniquely apposite title of Robert Garland's new book, *The Eye of the Beholder*, a study of the reactions elicited in the ancient Graeco-Roman mind by the sight of the physically impaired.

Garland is a professor of classical studies at Colgate University, New York. His previous books identified him as an out-

standing scholar with a lively interest in the views held in the ancient Hellenic world on our biological nature, its appalling frailties and inexorable finitude. Garland has now summoned an impressive array of materials to survey the fears, prejudices and superstitions that surrounded bodily deformity, as well as the gallant efforts to transcend the anguish consubstantial to this human tragedy. He draws on vase-painting, sculpture, poetry, drama, ancient medical writings, ethnology, archaeology and mythology. All this is engagingly brought to bear on a learned exploration of the ways in which the ancient Graeco-Roman mind tried to come to terms with the dismal fact of physical incapacitation produced by age or crippling disease.

The picture that emerges is patinated by a certain inevitable callousness, for a society where life was "nasty, brutish and short" — average lifespan of 37 and 44 years respectively for men and women — was not likely to promote warm feelings of genuine concern for the disadvantaged. More commonly, the weak were looked upon with disdain, and contempt was predicated on the unfeeling tenets of a pseudoscientific *physiognomy* that upheld the principle of bodily deformity as an outward expression of inner baseness. Exalted humanists, such as the elegiac poet Theognis of Megara (sixth century BC), bemoaned the fact that the morally depraved are sometimes deceptively handsome, but would not carry this lamentation to the point of challenging belief in the fundamental correspondence between bodily deformity and moral or spiritual wretchedness.

Consequently, the lame, the blind, the ugly and the weak were reviled, turned into scapegoats (*pharmakos*) for the ills that beset the community, then delivered to ritual punishment or execution; released into beggarmdom, sometimes after deliberate maiming, as in Seneca's haunting narrative of children brutally mutilated or blinded in order to increase their earnings as beggars; collected as pets in the household of the rich and powerful, there to carry out menial and humiliating tasks, as did the eunuch whose appointed function was, according to Martial, to steady his master's wavering penis over a chamber pot while he was urinating; displayed publicly as oddities, as were dwarfs and giants during the reign of Augustus; sold as outright merchandise in a 'monster market' or *teraton agora*, mentioned by Plutarch in *Moralia*, and which, according to Garland, may have existed side by side with the market of slaves in many cities of the empire. There, the deformed, coveted as exotic 'objects', could command higher prices than the hale. Martial mentions a buyer who demanded his money back when he found out that a slave he had purchased was not an idiot, as he had

been led to believe.

The physically handicapped were also made into objects of derision, victims of the cutting satire, the pointed, steely jesting and unforgiving irony with which are provided, as with lacerating thorns the rose bush, the comedies of Plautus, Persius and Aristophanes. Garland devotes thoughtful pages to the possible meaning behind the seemingly heartless act of mocking the disabled. Without wishing "to impart any moral judgement into [his] analysis", he points out the complex causality: sadistic impulses, sexual and scatological tendencies, and the desire to exorcise the threat embodied in concrete physical disability, for "to deride the monster is to deprive him, at least temporarily, of his malevolent power". Other chapters deal with the representation of physical deformity in popular or folk art; the groping attempts of the medical profession to correct a few malformations, notably deformities of the spine; the early, rudimentary notions about the cause of congenital malformations; and that most peculiar of collective myths, belief in the existence of 'monstrous races' that populated remote regions of the world.

Garland tells us that we know next to nothing about the fate of infirm or disabled slaves; that the rich epigraphic and literary Greek sources, in contrast to the Roman, hardly mention monstrous births as omens; and that "there are almost no known representations of the severely disabled in the entire canon of classical art", however many vivid depictions there may be in folk art. The eye of *any* beholder, it must be noted, is a zealous gate-keeper. Seeing is not a passive act. We do not retract our eyelids to let the world rush in, as one who opens a sluiceway simply allows the pouring inward of a body of water impelled by purely external forces. No; seeing is an actively exclusionary process, a ceaseless, though perhaps unconscious sifting. Seeing, to function normally, must go hand in hand with blindness. What we fail to see is therefore at least as telling of our intimate self as is the cast and character of our personal vision of the world. Classical Greece chose to lift her eyes in enraptured contemplation of a sublime ideal of bodily perfection, while averting them, perhaps out of a sense of utter powerlessness, from the ubiquitous presence of bodies broken, thwarted and undone.

The Eye of the Beholder is an important, fascinating book that will command the attention of all those interested in the history of ideas. It is an articulate reminder of our unalterable kinship to the historical past. The deformed are no longer regarded as portents or as proper targets of ridicule. But despite our protestations to the contrary, a survey of contemporary history will show that societal and cultural attitudes in the past hundred years have

engendered untold suffering for the physically handicapped. Today, we enter a scientific revolution in the field of genetics still clinging to the belief that the congenitally malformed are, in the words of Garland, "a problem, the curing of which is their final elimination". Two millennia seem not to have decreased one bit the pathos, the gripping power of the well known Sophoclean line, that for some unfortunates "not to be born is, past all prizing, best". To which we continue to rejoice in bewilderment: "Yes, but who is so lucky as to have *that* happen to him? Not one in ten thousand!" Laughter, if devoid of malice, is still a legitimate defence. □

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The researcher's dilemma

George J. Annas

Subjected to Science: Human Experimentation in America before the Second World War. By Susan E. Lederer. *Johns Hopkins University Press: 1995. Pp. 192. \$32.95, £27.50.*

THE Nuremberg Code, established by US judges in 1947 at the trial of Nazi doctors following the Second World War, remains the most authoritative statement of the

sary, consent is not a sufficient precondition for lawful human experimentation. Eight of the code's other nine provisions deal with measures researchers are obliged to take before they can even seek a potential subject's consent. Perhaps the most controversial of these is that the "experiment should be designed and based on the results of animal experimentation".

Because of the central importance of the Nuremberg Code, Susan Lederer believes that recent scholarship has tended to ignore the ethics of pre-Second World War experiments and apparently assumed that there were no formal rules before 1947. This seems, for example, to have been the case when the US Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, charged with establishing the ethics of such experiments conducted by the US government, announced last year that it had discovered a 1953 directive in which the US Secretary of Defense formally adopted the Nuremberg Code as official policy shortly after the election of General Dwight Eisenhower as President. Although this directive, like most military documents, was stamped "top secret", its existence has in fact been well known at least since General Richard Taylor presented it at a public hearing before a US Senate subcommittee in 1975. But neither 1947, 1953 nor 1975 is the critical date in determining when the ethics embodied in the Nuremberg Code should be considered as applicable to all medical researchers. As the code's authors made clear, they were not writing new law or ethics. Rather, they believed they were

IMAGE
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REASONS

Murderous medicine — Nazi doctors on trial in Nuremberg.

rules of human experimentation despite almost 50 years of pressure from the World Medical Association to replace it with various versions of the Helsinki Declaration. The core of the code is the requirement of the voluntary, competent, informed and understanding consent of the research subject. But although neces-

merely formalizing "certain basic principles [that] must be observed in order to satisfy moral, ethical and legal concepts". So the real issue is whether these human-rights principles were in fact widely held and recognized.

Lederer's research on medical experiments in the United States before the Sec-